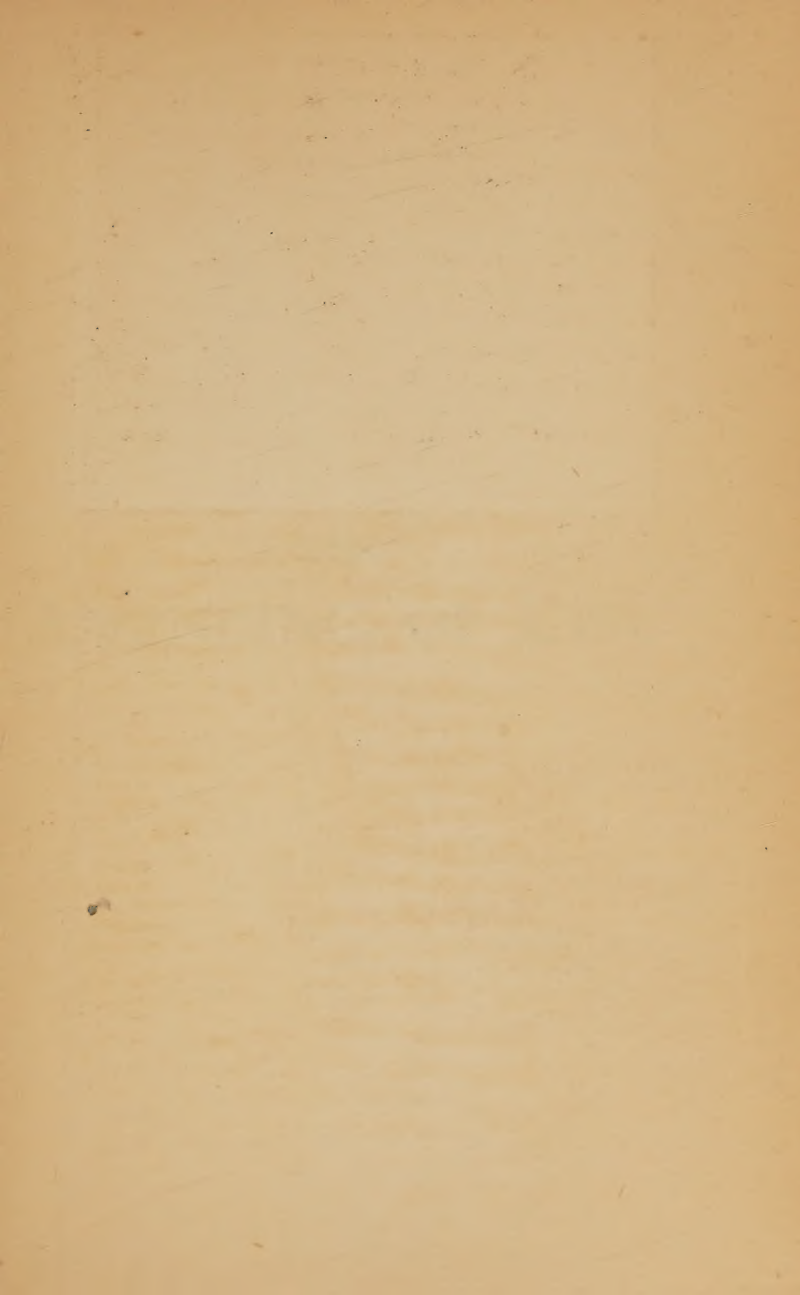





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THE  
AMENDING OF LIFE



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THE  
AMENDING OF LIFE

A MODERN ENGLISH VERSION

OF THE

"EMENDATIO VITÆ"

OF

RICHARD ROLLE, OF HAMPOLE (Hermit)

*Rolle de Hampole, Richard, 1300? - 1349*

*Translated with an Introduction by the*

REV. H. L. HUBBARD, M.A.

(Parish Priest of All Saints' Parish, Margate)

Author of "THE DREAMLAND OF REALITY," "SELF-TRAINING  
IN MYSTICISM," "SOCIAL PRAYER," Etc., Etc.

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First,  
To the Glory and Praise of God  
for the building up of souls:  
and thereafter to  
EVELYN UNDERHILL  
Poet, Mystic, Friend.

## BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

*POETRY :*

Bethlehem : and Other Verse.

Epiphanies.

The Dreamland of Reality.

*PROSE :*

Mary's Memories.

Flowers of Meditation (from the French of  
St. Francis de Sales).

Social Prayer.

Self-training in Mysticism.

The Restoration of the Kingdom (Editor).

## PREFACE.

**I**N preparing the text of this version of the *Emendatio Vitæ* I have tried to keep before me a double aim. I have sought to retain as far as possible the atmosphere of the original to which no small part of its charm is due ; and at the same time to render it into language which can be readily understood by the men and women of to-day. Hence I have not hesitated to disregard literalness of translation in order to present the underlying ideas of the original in contemporary English phraseology ; for I am persuaded that the value of such a book as this lies in the spirit and not the letter. More accurate translations exist, and scholars may turn to them. I have tried to keep in view the need of the devout Christian, of no great intellectual attainments, but with a heart full of love towards Christ, and desirous of following Him in the “ way which leadeth unto life.”

I have used as the foundation of my text the translation from the original made by Richard Misyn in 1434. I must record my deep gratitude to Miss Frances Comper for her edition of Misyn’s translation published by Messrs. Methuen & Co., in 1914. Where Misyn’s translation was obscure I have consulted a Latin MS. (De la Bigne, Lyons, 1677 ; collated with the *Speculum Spiritualium*, Paris, 1510), kindly lent to me by my friend, the Rev. Dundas Harford, himself an editor of the *Emendatio Vitæ*.

To Mr. Harford I owe my deepest thanks for his unfailing kindness and help. Most of all I am profoundly grateful to my wife, who, at a time when my other work was exceptionally heavy, undertook the onerous task of correcting the text; and whose sympathetic criticism and encouragement has helped me all through.

H.L.H.

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COLLECT FOR THE COMMEMORATION OF  
RICHARD THE HERMIT ON NOVEMBER 1st.

*(Prepared by the nuns of Hampole in the Office drawn up against his canonization, and included in the York Breviary).*

O God, Who, through the example of Thy holy hermit, Richard, hast taught us to despise the world and with pure hearts earnestly to desire heaven: grant us, we beseech Thee, by his merits and prayers, truly to follow his example, and with him to partake of the abundance of Thy joy in everlasting bliss: Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

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## THE AMENDING OF LIFE

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## INTRODUCTION.

THE question might well be asked by the modern man, even by the devout Christian of to-day : “ Of what value are the counsels of a fourteenth century hermit to men and women living in the restless days of the twentieth century ”? There is at first sight a strong measure of justification for such a question. The Christian Religion must express itself in forms suitable to each successive age. The life of the hermit would seem to belong to an earlier day, before the more corporate aspect of Christianity succeeded to that individualism of which the solitary life is a conspicuous expression. That is the attitude which is commonly found among men and women of to-day.

It is a true conception, both of modern life and of modern Christianity, but it is not the whole truth. Although the outward expression of the life of discipleship must needs change with changing years, yet the consecration of the whole of life to the service of God is ever a phenomenon of our Holy Religion. The response of the human soul to the call of God is every whit as complete in the life of the twentieth century disciple as it was in the days of Richard Rolle. God calls some of his followers to-day to renounce entirely the life of the world and withdraw themselves to some quiet retreat where they may “ with Him continually dwell.” He calls all men to take up the cross and follow Him. After all the world, despite great changes in the outward



conditions of life, has altered very little during six centuries. There is the same unfriendliness and jealousy which mar true fellowship. The rich still oppress the poor; not perhaps outwardly but by despising them in their hearts. Church people are every bit as hypocritical as they were in the Middle Ages. *Tempora mutantur* is true; *et nos mutamur in illis* is false.

Richard Rolle was the most widely read and popular of writers during the fifteenth century. No less than five versions of *The Amending of Life* exist in the vernacular, and some sixty or seventy MSS. of the same treatise survive to this day. We may well ask how it is that so popular a writer has been so much neglected after the brief period of his popularity was ended. It has been suggested that Rolle came under the suspicion of the orthodox for his supposed leanings toward Lollardy. It is a little difficult to support this contention either from his writings or from the few facts of his life which are known to us. Even if he were a Lollard<sup>1</sup> or a

<sup>1</sup>Richard Rolle could hardly have been familiar with the teaching of Wyclif, since the latter was not born till 1325, and would, therefore, have only been twenty-four years old when Rolle died. But the Lollards existed before Wyclif taught their doctrines in England. They were a religious community established in Antwerp in 1300, devoted more especially to the cure of the sick and the burial of the dead, functions which were seriously neglected by the official ministry. They were exceedingly unpopular with the clergy, and were prosecuted by the Church. So great was the animosity they provoked that the name "Lollard" (originally given to them because of their work of chanting dirges at funerals; German *lullen*, to chant), became a synonym for "heretic"; and was applied later to the followers of Wyclif in England.

sympathiser with the teachings afterwards popularised by Wyclif, it need not have obscured his writings in post-Reformation times, when many of the principles for which the early Lollards were prosecuted became incorporated into orthodox English Christianity.

It is much more likely that Rolle's decline in popularity was due to the Reformation. During that stormy period—in England and on the Continent—the controversialist assumed the position hitherto occupied in the estimation of Christian men by the mystic. If it be true to say of Christians that some are attracted by the mystical aspect of their religion, others by the institutional and the intellectual, during the sixteenth century the latter almost completely ousted the former. The mighty flood of mysticism which swept across Europe during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, was reduced to a trickling streamlet during the next two centuries.

Now that there seems to be every indication of a widespread revival of Christian mysticism, Richard Rolle, the hermit of Hampole, will assuredly come into his own again.

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## I. THE SPIRITUAL BACKGROUND OF THE XIVth CENTURY.

Properly to understand the work of any writer it is necessary to relate him to the period in which he lived

and worked. A right appreciation of the spiritual life of the first half of the fourteenth century will add considerably to the reader's interest in the work of Richard Rolle, and to the profit which he will derive from the study of such a treatise as the *Emendatio Vitæ*. It is not possible to write at any length on the history of the English Church between the years 1290 and 1349, but only to notice the outstanding features of the ecclesiastical life of the period. The details of the picture may be filled in from any Church history text book.<sup>1</sup>

The early years of the fourteenth century in England marked the beginnings of that anti-papal feeling which was to come to fruition at the Reformation during the sixteenth century. Many and various were the causes of this feeling. In the year 1290 (the earliest reputed date of the birth of Richard Rolle), the Jews were expelled from England. This led, naturally enough, to national poverty and gave rise to a period of new taxation to meet the financial loss. An attempt was made to tax the clergy and the Pope (Boniface VIII.), replied with the famous bull *Clericis laicos* (1296) which forbade temporal sovereigns to tax their clergy and the clergy to pay such taxes. This bull, and the resulting *impasse*, led up to a series of anti-papal laws culminating in the Statutes of Provisors (1351) and Praemunire (1353).

<sup>1</sup>I would specially recommend *A History of the Church of England* by M. W. Patterson (Longmans); and *An Introduction to the History of the Church of England* by H. O. Wakeman, (Rivingtons).

Another cause leading up to anti-papal developments in England was the "Avignonese captivity" of the Popes. Clement V., the successor of Boniface VIII. was unable to live in Italy, and settled at Avignon and became a dependent of the French King. It was hardly to be expected that Englishmen would willingly acknowledge the spiritual headship of a satellite of their hereditary enemy. The French wars had had the result of welding the various elements in the English nation into a composite whole; and that newly-awakened "nationalism" was not going to bend the knee to a Pope who was so much under the control of France.

Already the first symptoms of the Reformation were apparent. Under ground, a movement of revolt was going on; a movement which a few years later was to be welded together by the spiritual genius of John Wyclif. On all sides, the hatred of foreign domination and the desire for national independence, both spiritual and temporal, was increasing. This is not to say that religion—as distinct from ecclesiastical politics—was affected in the same direction or to the same degree. Side by side with "criminous and scandalous" clerics (always held up to the scorn of the people in every age), there were men of the type of Chaucer's "poor parson." A strange medley of piety and ribaldry, of robust holiness and equally robust sinfulness, informed the religious life of the fourteenth century.

It is against a background of this nature that we have to set the life and writings of Richard Rolle. We see in him the best type of independent spiritual outlook. If he is spiritually outside the reach of his contemporaries, he is sufficiently human to be influenced by the best thought and ideals of his age. How far that influence worked upon him can best be seen by a study of his writings.

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## II. THE HERMIT VOCATION.

It is not the purpose of this section to deal with the Religious Life as a whole, but only, and that briefly, with the vocation to the solitary life of the hermit. It is extraordinarily hard to commend such a life to men and women to-day, yet it is probably true to say that religion has lost an untold spiritual blessing and power with the gradual decline of the hermit life. There are hermits to-day, but the Christian world shrugs its shoulders at them and refuses to sympathise with their ideals. In so doing the Christian world exhibits its own stupidity and makes that which might have been for its wealth into an occasion, if not of falling, at any rate of senseless ridicule.

There are two fundamental desires in human nature upon which the ideal of the Religious Life is built. One is the desire to escape from the trammels of the flesh

and, by renunciation of the world and of self, to purify the soul. The other is the desire for unity. In the midst of the many the soul seeks for the One, that it may rest in peace and contentment. These two desires—the ascetic and the mystic—lie at the root of every kind of Religious Life. The monk, the friar, the anchorite, the hermit, all alike give themselves, under different outward conditions of life, to the search for Reality.

It may well be that we can understand the method of approach to God entailed in the common life of a Religious House, or of an active vocation to the service of the Creator revealed in the creature. We are not wholly baffled by the life of the monk or the friar. But have we sufficient affinity with the hermit's ideal to appreciate it? We may well ask "What are the motives which draw a soul to the solitary place, be it a desert, a mountain cave, or a forest clearing?" First and foremost it is the call of God. Against that sense of inward conviction by which a man is led to believe he is called of God to a certain course of action, no one can legitimately protest. To feel the call and to respond to it places a man outside the region of criticism. Even so it might be argued that a man may be mistaken in his call. Granted the possibility of such a mistake, we can fall back in the last resort upon the fundamental test: "By their fruits ye shall know them." Just as a prophet was to be recognised as such if his prophecy came to pass (Jer. xxviii., 9), so a hermit may be judged by the



result, manifest in his life, of his response to his vocation. Can it be denied that in his lonely cell the hermit experienced a real and vital communion with God ?

Even so the man of the world might still argue : “ If the hermit vocation be a genuine and legitimate one, why has it died out in the life of the Christian Church ? ” The answer is that it has not died out. There are still some who respond to the call (the author knows of one) ; but there are hundreds more to whom the call comes and who do not respond to it. They are not willing to leave everything for Jesus’ sake. They turn a deaf ear to the call, and go on their way. The overwhelming desire for solitude which many a soul experiences (all true disciples feel it in greater or less degree) may well be the loving voice of the Master calling the soul to “ come unto Him.”

Are there any special marks by which a Christian can recognize his or her call to the solitary life ? Most assuredly there are. We can do no more than mention three. First, a real enthusiasm for the life and a willingness to embrace the bitter cross of loneliness ; secondly, a deep humility, which is ready voluntarily to give the self to God without reserve and to trust him “ though he slay ” ; lastly, singleness of aim without which no man can experience the surpassing beauty of the beatific vision. Not all souls that are afire with a passionate enthusiasm, or marked by the cross of humility and purity of heart, are called to be hermits, but some are.

Should they not be allowed to live the solitary life without incurring the contempt or mockery of their fellow Christians ?

A story is told of three monks who each sought to exercise his vocation in a different direction. One chose the part of peace-making between men, the second to visit the sick, and the third to dwell in quietness in the desert. The first two, finding it impossible to fulfil their self-chosen tasks, went and recounted their failures to the third. The latter suggested that each of them should fill a vessel with water and pour it into a basin. Then he bade them look into the basin immediately and tell him what they saw. They replied that they saw nothing. After the water had ceased to move he told them to look again. Then they told him that they could see their faces clearly reflected in the water. " So is it with you and me," said the hermit, " you who live in the world can see nothing because of the activities of men. I who dwell alone in peace and quietness can see both God and men."

The hermit has a real contribution to make to the religious life of his time ; never more so than to-day. He stands for the absoluteness of God's demands upon a human soul, in a world which gives to God at best a divided service. He is an abiding protest against the lure of creature comforts, and a constant reminder of divine love and friendship. He sets up in a world of bewildering complexity a standard of simplicity, which

is the fruit of a single dominant ideal and purpose. By his absolute poverty and dependence he bids men lay up for themselves treasures in heaven. That is no mean contribution to the life of the world; to show the beauty of sanity to the insane, the blessedness of poverty to the strugglers after wealth, the joy of communion with God to the seekers of the praise of men. There is surely an abundant need for the hermit life to-day. God is calling men and women to it; may they recognize and respond to the divine vocation.

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### III. LIFE OF RICHARD ROLLE.

There are two principal sources upon which the biographer of Richard Rolle must draw. The first is the *Officium de Sancto Ricardo de Hampole* which the nuns of Hampole drew up when it was thought likely that Rolle would be canonized. He was never officially made a "saint," and the task of the nuns was a vain one; but they continued to use the *Officium* privately in their convent on the commemoration day of Rolle (November 1st) and it now appears in the York Breviary. The other source is the writings of Rolle, where occasional autobiographical hints are to be found. These latter deal primarily with his spiritual life, and the *Officium* remains the chief source for our information with regard to his outward activities.

Richard Rolle was born between 1290 and 1300 at Thornton in Yorkshire. The question has not yet been

settled as to whether this was Thornton-le-Dale or Thornton-le-Street. The weight of evidence is in favour of the former, though it may not be amiss to state briefly the facts in favour of each of the two claimants. The only evidence in favour of Thornton-le-Street consists in a note added to the margin of a single MS. of *Vita*. This note speaks of Thornton as being "juxta Pikering." Against this, and in favour of Thornton-le-Dale, there are three pieces of evidence. (1) Thornton-le-Dale is between Northallerton and Thirsk, about five or six miles from Topcliffe. The Rev. H. R. Bramley (Editor of Rolle's *Prose Psalter*) is of opinion that Topcliffe Church was the scene of some of the earliest events of the hermit's life. (2) In the neighbourhood there is a hamlet called Dalton.<sup>1</sup> (3) There is in existence a fine of lands<sup>2</sup> in the county of York dated 44 Ed. III. (i.e., 1371). To quote the Rev. Dundas Harford, "it was made between John, son of Sir John Dalton, knight, of Kirkby Misperton and Sir William Pertenev, knight, and relates to a messuage and ten bovates in Kirkby Misperton, held as dowry by Margery, widow of the late Sir John de Dalton. From this it may be fairly safe to infer that this Sir John was the same as he who befriended Richard Rolle, and the Dame Margery the

<sup>1</sup>The manor of Topcliffe would, however, hardly have belonged to Rolle's patron, Sir John Dalton, since there is a contemporary brass in Topcliffe Church with effigies of John de Topclif and his wife, who were probably Lord and Lady of that manor.

<sup>2</sup>Bodleian MS. Dodsworth I., folio 505.

lady who appears in several of the Lections of the *Vita*. John de Dalton the younger, would perhaps be one of the two sons who had known Rolle at Oxford. Kirkby Misperton is about five miles from Thornton-le-Dale, and that fact lends strong support to the claims of that Thornton to be the birthplace of the hermit, and of that Kirkby to be the scene of his taking up the hermit life."

Leaving the disputed question of the hermit's birthplace we learn from the *Legenda* that his parents were hard put to it to educate him. Fortunately he attracted the attention of Thomas Neville, Archdeacon of Durham, who sent him to Oxford, and whose kindness Rolle repaid by making great progress in his studies. In his nineteenth year he felt the irresistible call to the hermit life, and begging the wherewithal to fashion a hermit's robe from his sister (she generously gave him two old tunics and her father's rain-hood), he turned his back upon his home and his family.

Entering a certain church on the vigil of the Assumption, he was recognized by two Oxford friends, the sons of Sir John Dalton. On the following day Rolle entered the pulpit of the church with the parish priest's permission and preached a sermon. He was afterwards invited to dine with Sir John, but in his humility he went and sat with the servants. Being raised from his lowly seat by his host, the latter discovered that Rolle was the son of a dearly-loved friend, William Rolle. For the sake of his father as well as his

own, Sir John Dalton kept Richard for a long time in his own house, and afterwards gave him a hermitage and provided for his needs. Later, after the state of mystical union with God had been reached, Richard Rolle probably gave up the solitude which he loved and for many years wandered far and wide, preaching his mystical doctrine of the "Heat, Sweetness and Song" of the Love of God. Finally he settled as confessor (or more probably director, since it is uncertain whether he ever received priest's orders) to the Cistercian nuns at Hampole, near Doncaster. There he died in 1349<sup>1</sup>.

Many miracles are attributed to the prayers and sanctity of Richard Rolle in the *Legenda* of the *Officium*. An analysis of these phenomena shews that they were miracles of healing, and in a few cases actually the resuscitation of the apparently dead. We have here a clear example of the power of the spirit over the body, of the place of prayer in the ministry of healing, to which so much attention is being drawn to-day.

Side by side with his outward life there went an intense development in the spiritual life of Richard Rolle. In spite of some variations in the manner of describing it, it is apparent that he passed through the successive stages of the mystic pilgrimage. The embracing of the hermit life, he regards as his conversion ("When I had perceived my especial vocation, and laying side my

<sup>1</sup>He may have been a victim of the Black Death which visited England for the first time in 1349 with terrible consequences.



worldly dress had determined to serve God rather than man, it befell that on a certain night in the beginning of my conversion. . .” Lect. vii.) From the moment when he set his will towards God he never looked back. He is punctilious in noting the length of time which he spent in each of the intermediate stages of the mystic way. Thus he writes, “ Three years, except three or four months, were run from the beginning of the change of my life and of my mind (conversion) to the opening of the heavenly door ” (Fire of Love, Chap. xv). That was his time of purgation. “ The door yet abiding open, nearly a year passed until the time in which the heat of everlasting love was felt in my heart.” (Fire of Love, Chap. xv.) So he passed through the stage of illumination. At last he reaches the condition of union with God. Suddenly, when at his prayers in a chapel, he felt the heat of divine love. This heat, soon to be accompanied by sweetness and song, brought to Richard Rolle the certainty of his experience of divine union. His life had touched Reality, and his soul tasted the fruits of the love of God. Henceforth those who came in touch with Richard Rolle would take knowledge of him that he had been with Jesus.

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#### IV. THE MYSTICISM OF RICHARD ROLLE.

Before attempting to define the outstanding characteristics of the mystical teaching of Richard Rolle,

it may serve to clear the ground if some attempt be made to define mysticism. It is extraordinarily difficult to set down in words an exact explanation of a spiritual experience, or to make a definition which shall cover all the ground. The mystical life is an "infused" experience—that is to say, it is the free gift of God to certain souls that are able to respond to its demands. Looked at from the human side it consists of a number of more or less easily recognisable spiritual conditions, generally following one another in a definite sequence, and each leading the soul in turn to the ultimate condition of union with God. Certain phenomena (such as visions and ecstasies) occasionally accompany this spiritual pilgrimage, but are in no sense whatever essential to the mystic life.<sup>1</sup> For convenience sake, mysticism may be defined as "the science of the union of the soul with God." Such a definition allows for the call and the response, for the ultimate goal and for the temporal pilgrimage of the soul.

The stages through which the mystic passes on his journey towards Reality may be classified under any number of headings. For all practical purposes, however, we may adopt those divisions of the spiritual journey which go by the general description of *The Threefold Way*. At the outset the soul must be weaned from the love of things temporal and purified by discipline for the heavenly vision. This stage is called

<sup>1</sup> Vide Evelyn Underhill *The Essentials of Mysticism*.

Purgation, and includes such experiences as disillusionment, detachment, and mortification. Next the cleansed soul steps out upon the Way of Illumination. On the empty canvas (to change the metaphor), the Divine Artist begins to paint the Image of Himself. The soul grows, through prayer and meditation, into the likeness of Jesus. At last when the picture is complete the Father gathers the soul of the mystic to His bosom and the life of the creature is made radiant in the depths of divine light. This is the stage of Union with God, the ultimate goal of the mystic way.

Richard Rolle passed through all these stages of the spiritual pilgrimage though he describes them under different terms. We have already seen the care with which he describes his mystic progress.<sup>1</sup> Beginning with conversion (which for him was synonymous with his entry upon the hermit life) he passed through the stages of purgation and illumination. He uses three beautiful metaphors to describe his experiences of the unitive way. He speaks of Heat, Sweetness and Song. "I sat forsooth in a chapel and whilst with sweetness of prayer or meditation muckle I was delighted, suddenly in me I felt a merry heat and unknown." The fire of divine love was to Richard Rolle no mere poetic imagery. It was a sensuous experience. "Thus with fire untrowed and piercing flame, the soul of a lover is burned. It gladdens all things and heavenlike sparkles."

<sup>1</sup>*Vide supra*. Section III.

The sweetness which follows the heat of divine love is the sweetness of full and utter possession. The soul of the contemplative lives and moves and has its being in the world of Reality. The outer veils of life are drawn aside and the soul passes within to taste "the marvellous honey" of communion with God. Supreme-ly this intimate communion with divine love expresses itself in song. The soul is flooded with rich harmonies of a wild yet ordered loveliness which contemplation changes into an exultant melody of sound. The soul of the mystic joins the angel-host and shares in the music of eternity. "Soothly it is the sweetness of angels that he has received into his soul : and the same praises, though it be not in the same words, he shall sing to God." Herein consists the highest vocation of mortal man, to share the worship of angels.

In experiences such as these Richard Rolle proclaims himself to be a genuine mystic, since the experiences pre-suppose the Reality. He reached the stage of union and from the heights of sublime love he was able to look back over the pathway of his journey, and to trace with a sure hand the stages by which he attained his goal. Those stages he sets forth with great clearness in the *Emendatio Vitæ*, and all who will may read them for themselves, and follow them in their own lives—if they dare so high an adventure. We can now pass on to notice the distinguishing marks of Rolle's mystical doctrine.

I. *Subjectivity and Objectivity.* It has been said of Rolle that he was "one of the most subjective of the mystics." This is not strictly true; or rather it is only partially true. The subjective side of Rolle's mysticism comes out in the *Incendium Amoris*, where he analyses with great skill and profound insight his spiritual experiences. But in the *Emendatio Vitæ* it is far otherwise. He gives the impression that mysticism is as much an objective as a subjective experience. It is something which is offered to God in response to His call; a life, a love, a sacrifice. Nurtured by due observance of certain rules the soul of man is taught to respond to the demands of divine love. The mystic gives out as much as he takes in. The eyes of his soul look outwards to God as well as inwards to his own life. By the things he does as well as by those he experiences he climbs the Jacob's ladder from earth to heaven. Such is the teaching which Rolle gives to those who read the *Emendatio Vitæ*.

The "outgoing" conception of the mystic way is as conspicuous in the life of Richard Rolle as it is in his teaching. He left his hermit-cell when the unitive stage of his spiritual pilgrimage had been reached, and became a missionary. He went about giving his experiences to all who desired to tread in the same path. He poured out the riches of his interior life, and put them at the disposal of other men. The Kingdom of God is an experience not to be kept to oneself but to be

shared with others. Having tasted the joy of union with God the mystic can never rest until he has exhausted every means at his disposal for bringing other men to the same goal. The true mystic is not a self-centred dreamer ; he is a God-centred man of action.

2. *Robustness and Honesty.* In nothing do the English mystics differ more markedly from their Continental brethren than in the robustness of their outlook. It is as if the "hard grey weather" had "bred hard Englishmen"; and the beauty and romance of the English countryside has penetrated within the sphere of the spirit itself. Theirs are not the terrifying austerities of a S. John of the Cross, of a S. Ignatius Loyola, or of the hermits of the Thebaid ; but a sweet moderation marks all their ascetic practices. In the way of purgation Richard Rolle notes as his greatest and most severe discipline not the mutilation of the body but the contempt of other men for his way of life. God sends the special discipline which each soul needs for its perfection and the soul must respond to it. Such in essence is the attitude of Richard Rolle towards the austerities of the purgative way. Honesty goes hand in hand with robustness in the mystical doctrine of Rolle. He does not hesitate to call a spade a spade. The vigour of much of his language is hardly possible of reproduction in our softer and more sensitive days. He is on fire with a passionate longing for God and His righteousness, and will brook no kind of parleying with the least of the forces of evil.



The love of the countryside is almost as marked in Rolle as it is in S. Francis of Assisi.<sup>1</sup> The birds, the flowers, the woods, and the hills, all speak to the soul of Richard Rolle, and tell him of the heavenly country to which his pilgrimage is leading him. They are shadows of the eternal cast upon the world of time.

3. *Analysis and interpretation of mystical experiences.* Richard Rolle displays a methodical mind and outlook in his classification of mystical experiences. Especially is this the case in the *Emendatio Vitæ*; where he deals with the successive stages of the spiritual life. He draws hard and fast lines where other mystics of his period are apt to be more vague and less defined (*e.g.*, between prayer, meditation and contemplation). He realises that the whole man must be offered to God in response to the divine call, and his spiritual counsel is applied to every part of the human personality (*e.g.*, body, mind, emotions, will, spirit, etc). He knows well the disastrous effects of an undisciplined spirituality, and he is careful to make of the interior life a well-ordered and tidily arranged collection of experiences.

In describing and interpreting mystical experiences Richard Rolle makes frequent use of physical terms. The heat which he felt at the beginning of the unitive stage was a sensory experience. He tasted the sweetness and heard the songs which accompanied the heat of divine love. It is a common phenomenon among the

<sup>1</sup>Miss Evelyn Underhill draws out with great skill and insight the likeness between Rolle and S. Francis of Assisi, in her introduction to Miss Comper's version of Rolle's *Fire of Love and Mending of Life*. (Published by Methuen & Co., 1914).

mystics that their spiritual experiences should leave behind them physical results. The *stigmata* are a well-authenticated example. Even (and here every reader has probably an example in his mind) the features and expression of the face is changed when a soul responds to the call of divine love. Moses' face shone when he spoke with God in the mount that burned with fire : many a countenance has been, and is being, transfigured by the contact of spirit with Spirit. Rolle's experience of physical sensations, striking as it undoubtedly is, is by no means unique in the lives of the Christain mystics.

4. *Christo-Centric.* All Richard Rolle's mystical doctrine is centred upon the Person of Jesus Christ. One has only to read Chapter XI. of the *Emendatio Vitæ* (Of the Love of God) to see how passionate was the devotion of Rolle to his Saviour. "So much does he worship the name *Jesu* that it remains in his thoughts for ever." Of the soul which has attained to the third or "singular" degree of love he writes, "She yearns for Christ and desires only Him. She waits and sighs for Him ; in Him she is on fire. . . whose memory is as a song of music in a feast of wine." Again, "All my heart is fixed in longing for Jesus." All the deeps of his profoundly sensitive nature are stirred at the thought of the love of God for him. He pours out his whole being in a rhapsody of love before the vision of his Redeemer. Love is the keynote of all his mysticism. The love of God for man, for all men, for his servant

Richard ; calls forth in return the utmost outpourings of love from the heart of man. Deep calleth to deep—and the thunder-tones of that tremendous experience are charged with the wild harmonies of the song of love.

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#### NOTE ON THE LITERARY STYLE OF RICHARD ROLLE.

Rolle wrote his books in the Yorkshire variety of the Northumbrian dialect. This dialect had close affinity to the Lowland Scots, and the student may be referred for more technical information to a small book by the late Prof. W. W. Skeat ; *English Dialects*, published by the Cambridge University Press in 1911, (pp. 25-35).

Two outstanding characteristics of Richard Rolle's literary style must strike the most casual reader. The first is his sudden lyrical outbursts, when he seems to desert the medium of prose for that of poetry. In this connection it is interesting to notice that Rolle wrote a poem called *The Prick of Conscience* which extends to 9624 lines. It was written about 1340, and was edited for the Philological Society by Dr. Morris in 1863. The other noticeable feature of Rolle's prose style is his use of imagery. Especially is he fond of using musical terms and figures to express his meaning. It is not unlikely that Rolle was himself a musician, since there are references to music and singing both in the *Legenda* of the *Officium* (e.g., Lections II., IX., etc.), and in the experiences which marked his entry upon the life of union with God.

## V. THE AMENDING OF LIFE.

The *Emendatio Vitæ* differs from every other of Richard Rolle's writings. It is a treatise dealing with the laws of the spiritual life, not a record of personal mystical experiences of the kind described in the *Incendium Amoris*. It is addressed to Christian people at large, unlike the *Melum Contemplativorum* which was written for one individual.<sup>1</sup> It is a carefully composed treatise on the Contemplative Life.

The *Emendatio Vitæ* is divided into twelve chapters, which fall quite naturally into four groups, each containing three chapters. The first group is negative in tone and deals with the stages by which the soul learns to forsake the world (Conversion, Despising of the World, Poverty). This is followed by three chapters describing the outward conduct and discipline of the Christian life (Right Ordering of Life, Tribulation, Patience). From this the writer passes to a group of chapters expounding the value of certain interior practices of the spiritual life (Prayer, Meditation, Reading). In the last three chapters Rolle pours out his whole heart in depicting the wonders of the mystical life (Purity of Heart, Love of God, Contemplation). These four divisions correspond very closely to the commonly accepted stages of the Mystic Way—Preparation, Purgation, Illumination, Union. How close this

<sup>1</sup>"Margaret," according to Cambridge MS. Dd. v. 64; "Cecil," according to Bodleian MS., Rawlinson C. 285.

correspondence is may best be shewn by an analysis of the *Emendatio Vitæ*. It is also possible for the student of Christian mysticism to see affinities between the writings of Rolle and those of his immediate predecessors and his contemporaries at home and on the continent. Especially is there a close resemblance between Rolle and both the Victorines and Franciscans.<sup>1</sup>

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### ANALYSIS OF *EMENDATIO VITÆ* (THE AMENDING OF LIFE).

Four main divisions of the book :—

- A. Preparation for the Mystical Life (Chaps. I., II., III.)
  - B. The Way of Purgation (Chaps. IV., V., VI.)
  - C. The Way of Illumination (Chaps. VII., VIII., IX.)
  - D. The Goal of Divine Union (Chaps. X., XI., XII.)
- A. *Preparation for the Mystical Life.*

#### I. *Conversion :*

*Motives for Conversion :* Suddenness of death. Desire to love Christ truly.

*Hindrances to Conversion :* “ The threefold cord ”—riches, flattery of women, beauty of youth.

Worldly occupations.

*Fruits of Conversion :* Glad suffering for Christ. Forgetfulness of worldly affairs. Great temptations.

<sup>1</sup>See above : Section IV

## INTRODUCTION

2. *Despising of the World* :—

The lover of the world delights in

1. Riches.
2. Dignity.
3. Wilfulness.
4. Power.
5. Honours.

The lover of Christ will despise

1. Lustiness of youth.
2. Riches.
3. Favours.
4. Beauty.
5. "All things that in this world pass away as a shadow."

Things that move a man to despise the world.

1. The world itself—its evil and its pain.
2. Changeableness of time.
3. Shortness of life and certainty of death.
4. Security of eternity.
5. Emptiness of things present ; truth of joys to come.

3. *Poverty* :

Poverty includes (besides actual necessity)

1. Change of thought and desire.
2. Singleness of aim.
3. Meekness of mind.



**B. *The Way of Purgation.*****1. *The Right Ordering of Life.*****(a) Three things which defile a man.**

1. Evil thoughts.
2. Uncontrolled words.
3. Sinful actions.

**(b) Three things which cleanse a man.**

1. Contrition of thought.
2. Confession of mouth.
3. Satisfaction of deed by—
  - (a) Fasting.
  - (b) Prayer.
  - (c) Almsgiving.

**(c) Three things which make for cleanness of heart.**

1. Recollection of God.
2. Guarding of outward senses.
3. Honest occupation.

**(d) Three things which preserve cleanness of word.**

1. Consideration in speech.
2. Avoidance of much speaking
3. Hatred of lying.

**(e) Three things which keep purity of work.**

1. Moderation in food and drink.
2. Avoidance of evil company.
3. Remembrance of death.

## INTRODUCTION

(f) Three things which lead to conformity with the Will of God.

1. Example of creatures.
2. Familiarity with God.
3. The joy of Heaven.

2. *Tribulation.*

The Devil seeks to turn a man from God by temptations and tribulations which must be resisted by patience.

3. *Patience.*

Tribulations are sent to withdraw us from love of the world, and are to be overcome by patient endurance.

Temptations are sent to bring us back from the love of God, and are to be overcome by faith, love and discipline.

C. *The Way of Illumination.*

1. *Prayer.*

Prayer leads a soul to :—

1. Love.
2. Peace.
3. Conquest of evil
4. Sweetness.
5. Recollection of God.

2. *Meditation.*

Meditation upon the Passion and Death of Christ.

1. Overcomes the devil.
2. Enflames the soul with the love of Christ.
3. Raises, cleanses and purifies the mind.
4. Acquaints the soul with the example of Jesus.

*Meditation* :—

1. Differs in method for every soul.
2. Is the gift of God.
3. May be learnt from the examples of the saints.

3. *Reading.*

Bible Reading leads us to :—

1. Habits of holiness.
2. Overcome sin.
3. Knowledge of God.

D. *The Goal of Divine Union* (it is impossible to do more than indicate the leading thoughts in each of the three last chapters ; since Rolle, being carried away by the sublimity of his subject, becomes rhapsodical in his style).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Richard Rolle is described in the *Legenda* of the *Officium* as speaking “a word of edification” for two hours and continuing to write at the same time (Lecture VI.) The *Legenda* goes on to say this “could in no wise have been possible unless the Holy Spirit had at that time directed both his hand and tongue.” A similar phenomenon is recorded of Ruysbroek (*vide* Evelyn Underhill, *Ruysbroek* p. 26). May we see in this an example of divinely inspired automatic writing ?

1. *Purity of Heart.*

Purity of heart is the fruit of a mind set upon God, and a spirit given to the exercises of the illuminative way. Its rewards are "song," "joy," and "love."

2. *The Love of God.*

There are three degrees of Christ's love.

1. Insuperable—when no other desire can overcome it.
  2. Inseparable—when it cleaves to Christ with unswerving attention.
  3. Singular—when nothing but Jesus can satisfy it.
3. *Contemplation*, defined by Rolle as *jubilus divini amoris*—"The joyful song of the love of God."

The marks of a contemplative soul :—

1. Interior quiet.
2. Intense joy.
3. Love of solitude.
4. Interior longing for the love of Christ.
5. Change of outward life and habits leading to the accusation of lunacy<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>An old name for the mystic was "God's Fool"

## CHAPTER I.

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### OF CONVERSION.

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**D**O not delay to be converted to our Lord, nor put it off from day to day ;<sup>1</sup> for frequently the agony of death seizes the unhappy man, and bitter pains suddenly devour those that seek to avoid conversion. We cannot reckon how many worldly people have been led astray by sinful presumption.

Truly it is a great sin to trust in God's mercy and not cease from sin, believing God's mercy to be so great that He will not give to sinners the punishment they deserve. Work ye therefore " while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work."<sup>2</sup> " Light or day " he calls this life, in which we ought never to cease from good works, knowing that our death is certain, but the hour of its approach uncertain. " The night " He calls death, in the which our members grow stiff and knowledge is laid aside, and we can no longer do any good work, but only receive joy or torment according to our deeds. For a moment of time we live—indeed less than a moment ; for our life is nought if we compare it to life everlasting.

<sup>1</sup>Eccles. v. 7.      <sup>2</sup>S. Jn. ix., 4.

How our life is wasted through love of vanity ; all the day we stand idle without repentance ! Lord, turn us and we shall be turned, heal us and we shall be healed.<sup>1</sup> Many are not healed and their wounds turn to decay ; for to-day they are turned to God and to-morrow away from Him, to-day they do penance and to-morrow turn again to sin. Of such it is written " We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed " ;<sup>2</sup> for she is not truly turned to Christ.

What else is turning to God than turning from the world and sin, from the devil and the flesh ? What is turning from God but turning from unchangeable good to changeable good ; to the pleasant beauty of creatures, to the works of the devil, to the lust of the flesh and the world ? We do not go to God by our footsteps, but by following His example in love, in good customs and habits.

Conversion to God is also achieved when we give the attention of our minds to Him, and continually ponder His counsel and His commandments, so that they may be fulfilled by us ; and wherever we may be, whether sitting or standing, the dread of God be in our hearts. I speak not of that dread which is a painful experience, but that which is the outcome of love with which we give reverence to the presence of so great a majesty, and fear lest we offend in any little thing. In such a condition we are truly turned to God, since we are turned away from the world.

<sup>1</sup>Jer. xvii., 14.

<sup>2</sup>Jer. li., 9.



To be turned from the world is nothing else than the putting behind us of all lust, and gladly suffering the bitterness of this world for God. It is to forget all idle occupations and worldly affairs insomuch that the soul, wholly turned to God, dies utterly to all things loved or sought in the world. Being thus given to heavenly desires the converted have God ever before their eyes and behold Him without weariness; as the Psalmist bears witness, "I have set the Lord alway before me";<sup>1</sup> that is to say "In my sight I saw our Lord evermore before me." "For ever"; not only for the space of an hour, as they set the fair or lovely things of earth before their inward eye, which they behold and in which they delight and desire, for love's sake, to rest. Later, the psalmist says "Mine eyes are ever toward the Lord; for He shall pluck my feet out of the net."<sup>2</sup> By this is meant that unless our heart is ceaselessly fixed on Christ we shall not escape the snare of temptation. And there are many things which prevent the heart being thus fixed on God, of which I will name three: the abundance of riches, the flattering of women, and the fairness and beauty of youth. This is the "threefold rope that scarcely may be broken";<sup>3</sup> yet it must be broken and despised if Christ is to be loved.

He that desires to love Christ truly, not only negatively without regret, but positively with untold joy, casts away everything that may hinder him. He spares

<sup>1</sup>Ps. xvi., 8 (xvi., 9). <sup>2</sup>Ps. xxv., 15 (xxv., 14). <sup>3</sup>Eccles. iv., 12.

neither father nor mother nor himself; he receives no man's hospitality; he does violence to all that would hold him back; he breaks through all obstacles. The most he can do seems but a small thing for the love he bears to God. He flees from vices, and seeks not worldly solace; but since he is absolutely and entirely turned towards God he has almost forgotten the outward things of sense. He is wholly gathered into, and lifted up to, Christ, so that when to all outward seeming he is in heaviness, then indeed he is wonderfully glad.

There are many that say they would turn to God but that they are held back by this or that occupation; whose lack of love we reprove with sorrow. For without doubt if they were touched with the least spark of Christ's love they would busily seek how they might do God's service, neither would they cease to seek until they had found. Often they make an excuse which only serves to accuse them the more.

Riches draw many away, and the flattering of women beguiles many more; even those that for a long time have done well are sometimes drowned in the worst ditches. For beauty is soon loved, and when it feels itself loved it is easily encouraged. Then the chosen one is cast down and is made worse than he was before his conversion. His name is blackened, and, from being accounted worthy, is now despised and abhorred of all.

I saw a man once of whom it was said that he chastised his body with great severity for fifteen years

and afterwards lapsed into sin with his servant's wife, refusing to be parted from her until his death. At his death it was told how he cursed the priest that came to him, and refused to receive the sacraments.

The newly converted ought to flee the occasion of sin and with the will avoid words, deeds and sights that provoke to ill. The more unlawful a thing is the more it must be avoided.

The devil also reproaches those whom he sees turned away from him and converted to God, and does not cease to kindle fleshly and worldly desires in them. He brings to their mind the delight that they once had in sin ; he shews the hardness and bitterness of penance in order to make them weary of it ; he raises numberless visions of evil, new thoughts and affections which hitherto were quiet and dormant. In the midst of these attacks it behoves the penitent to bestir and arm himself to resist the devil and all his suggestions : to subdue fleshly lusts and desire the love of God ; not to go from Him, but to despise the world. Of this last we will now speak.





## CHAPTER II.

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### OF THE DESPISING OF THE WORLD

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TO despise this world is to pass through this life without loving temporal and passing things ; to seek nothing in this world but God ; not to care for vain-glory nor comfort ; hardly to take what is essential ; and if at times the necessities of life are lacking to bear it with goodwill. This is “ the despising of the world.” Keep this in mind lest thou perish through love of it. Thus is the world despised and not loved.

All that we love we worship, and it is foul to worship dirt ; that is, to love earthly things. Rich men bind themselves as slaves to corruptible things, and rejoice to be called “ lords of men ” though they be “ servants of sin.” If a man be a “ lord of men ” it is not of nature but of fortune ; but if evil rule in his heart, it is the fault of his own perverse will. Put away therefore thy wicked will, and thou shalt be free from the devil and from sin, and made the servant of righteousness which teaches thee not to love earthly things.

Covetousness of the world and the love of God are contrary the one to the other and cannot remain together in one soul. The place is so narrow that one falls out.

The more thou castest out covetousness the more thou dost experience the love of God. The more of covetousness, the less of love.

O wretched soul, what dost thou seek in this world where all things are deceitful and passing away? The things that most flatter thee are the quickest to deceive. Why dost thou busy thyself to obtain temporal possessions? Why dost thou yearn with great desire for the things that shall perish? Dost thou not see that they perish even before they are possessed? "I know where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is."<sup>1</sup> He has blinded thine eyes and by his falsehoods has deceived thee, so that thou shouldest desire fleeting things; love hateful things; despise abiding things; and be drawn to perishing things. Thus thou dost build thy life on a false foundation; and when thou thinkest to stand thou dost fall into the fire.

Dwellers in temporal plenty are deceived by five things which they love: riches, dignity, wilfulness, power, and honours. These enslave them to sin and imprison them in wickedness. By these desires they are overcome and are never freed from them save by death. To be set free when only pain is left is too late. These desires hinder them from despising the world; from God's love; from self-knowledge; and from desire of the Kingdom of Heaven. No man can be

<sup>1</sup>Rev. ii., 13.



saved unless he cease to love the world with all that is in it. Cease therefore while life is yet in the body and the beauty of youth remaineth.

What things delight the man who sets himself to love Christ? He will despise the lustiness of youth and keep his strength for God. He will disregard riches. He will remember that favour is deceitful and beauty is vain. Need I write more? He will despise all things that in this world pass away as a shadow.

O lover of the flesh, what dost thou find in thy body to cause thee so to delight in it? Does the form or shape of it please thee so that thou hast thy joy in a skin? Why dost thou not heed what is hidden under the skin? Dost thou not know that bodily beauty is the covering of defilement, the spark of corruption, and often the cause of damnation? Therefore let it suffice thee, all else being despised, to love God; to praise God; to be with God; to rejoice in God; not to depart from Him, but to cleave to Him with unabated desire.

The world itself makes us despise it, since it is so full of unhappiness; in which is continual malice, destructive persecution, increasing wrath, consuming lust, false blaming for sin, and the bitterness of slander; where all things are confused and without order; where righteousness is not loved nor truth approved; where faithfulness is unfaithful and friendship cruel, since it endures only in prosperity and fails in adversity.

Other things there are that should move us to despise the world ; the changeableness of time ; the shortness of this life ; the certainty of death and its uncertain advent ; the security of eternity ; the emptiness of things present ; the truth of the joys to come.

Choose what thou wilt. If thou love the world, thou shalt perish with it ; if thou love Christ, thou shalt reign with him.



## CHAPTER III.

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### OF POVERTY.

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“**I**F thou wilt be perfect, go, sell all that thou hast and give it to the poor and come and follow Christ.<sup>1</sup>” In the forsaking of worldly things and in the following of Christ there is perfection. Not all that have forsaken their goods follow Christ, for many are worse than they were before. They give themselves up to backbiting and do not fear to take away the good fame of their neighbours. They swell with envy and malice; they esteem themselves before all others; they praise themselves and condemn others. Think how the devil has deceived such persons. They possess neither the world nor God, and he leads them by divers temptations into endless torment.

Thou that understandest what I have said consider thy poverty from another point of view. When he says “go and sell” He means a change of thought and desire. He that was proud is made lowly; he that was angry becomes meek; he that was envious learns charity; he that was covetous becomes generous. If before he

<sup>1</sup>S. Matt. xix., 21.

exceeded in meat or drink, let him now make amends by fasting. He that loved the world too much, now let him gather himself altogether into the love of Christ, and turn all the waywardness of his heart into a single desire for things eternal. It is no wonder that voluntary poverty should be profitable to a man, and the harm that he suffers for God be a glorious crown. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."<sup>1</sup>

What is poverty of spirit but a meekness of mind whereby a man knows his own infirmity? Seeing that a man cannot attain to steadfastness of heart but by the grace of God, anything that might withhold that grace from him he forsakes, and sets his desire only in the joy of his Maker. As from a single root spring many branches, so from voluntary poverty, considered in this light, proceed virtues and wonders beyond all conception. Some only change their clothes and not their souls; such forsake riches yet cease not to gather innumerable vices.

What is worse than a proud poor man? What more cursed than an envious beggar? If thou truly forsake all things for God think more of what thou shouldest despise than of that which thou shouldest forsake. Pay diligent heed to follow Christ in your daily life. "Learn of Me," he says, "for I am meek and lowly of heart."<sup>2</sup> He says not "Learn of Me for I am poor." In itself poverty is no virtue but rather a

<sup>1</sup>S. Matt. v. 3.

<sup>2</sup>S. Matt. xi., 29.

misfortune. It is not to be commended for itself but as the instrument of virtue, and because it leads to blessedness and causes many to shun the occasions of sin. For that reason it is to be praised and desired. It prevents a man from being honoured though he be virtuous ; rather does it make him despised and oppressed and to be cast out by worldly people. It is needful so to suffer for Christ's sake.

For our example Christ led a life of poverty in this world, since He knew how hard it is for them that abound in riches and pleasures to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. In order that men should the more earnestly desire poverty He has promised high honour and committed the task of judging the world to them that forsake all things for Him, saying, " Ye that have forsaken all things and followed Me shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."<sup>1</sup>

They that have embraced holy poverty and lack the meekness and lowliness that Christ teaches are more wretched than they that have plenty of riches. They shall not share the apostles' place in the day of judgment ; but shall be covered with confusion which is damnation of body and soul. They that shine in meekness and lowliness, though they have great riches, yet shall they be set at the right hand of Christ in the day of judgment.

<sup>1</sup>S. Matt. **xix.**, 28.

Some men say, " We cannot leave all, we are sick ; we must keep our necessities in order that we may live " ; and that is lawful. Nevertheless they are less worthy, since they dare not suffer anguish, poverty, and need, for God's sake. Yet by the grace of God they may reach the height of virtue, and lift themselves to the contemplation of heavenly things, if they forsake worldly occupations and without weariness continue in meditation and prayer. Also let them not love the goods they have but, having them, let them interiorly draw away from them.

Take heed also ; to seek more than enough is gross covetousness ; to keep back necessities is weakness ; to forsake all things is perfection. So long as they see high things that they cannot reach, men take no pride in, nor presume because of, the small things that they have ; so shall they attain to the right ordering of life ; of which we now write.





## CHAPTER IV.

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### OF THE RIGHT ORDERING OF LIFE.

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**I**N order that a man's life may be rightly directed to the worship of God and to his own profit and that of his neighbour four things must be said.

*First : What is it that defiles a man ?* There are three sins, or three kinds of sin ; that is to say of thought, of word, and of deed. A man sins in thought when he thinks anything against God. If he does not employ his mind with the praise and love of God but allows it to be disturbed with other thoughts or to go empty he has sinned in thought. He sins in word when he lies ; when he swears falsely ; when he curses ; when he slanders ; when he uses foolish or foul speech ; or when he speaks vain or idle words. He sins in deed in many ways : by lust ; by sinful embraces and kisses ; by wilful defilement ; by allowing, without great cause, occasions to arise by which he knows he might be defiled ; by robbing, stealing, deceiving or smiting others ; and by other such things.

*Secondly : What are the things that cleanse a man ?* They are three as against the three sources of defilement. (1) *Contrition of thought* and rooting out of all desires that have no reference to the praise and worship of God and His love. (2) *Confession of mouth* that ought to be early and complete. (3) *Satisfaction of deed*, which

has three parts : *Fasting* because he has sinned against himself ; *Prayer* because he has sinned against God ; *Almsgiving* because he has sinned against his neighbour. Yet he must not give alms of someone else's goods ; rather should he restore, for sin is not forgiven unless restoration is made of that which has been taken.

*Thirdly : What things make for cleanness of heart ?* They are three : an abiding recollection of God, so that there is no moment when thou dost not think of Him, except in sleep which is common to all ; a careful guarding of the outward senses so that tasting, hearing and seeing may be wisely restrained, bridled, and governed ; honest occupation such as Bible reading, speaking of God, writing, or some other good deed.

There are three things also that preserve *cleanness of word* : consideration in speech, avoidance of much speaking, and hatred of lying.

Three things keep *purity in work* : moderation in food and drink, avoidance of evil company, and constant remembrance of death.

*Fourthly : What things are they which lead us to conformity with the Will of God ?* These are three also. The example of creatures, which is learnt by observation ; familiarity with God, which is reached by meditation and prayer ; the joy of heaven, which is felt in part by contemplation.

The man of God, living in this way, shall be as a tree that is planted by the waterside—that is, the stream

of grace—so that he shall always be green in virtue and never dried up by sin. Moreover he shall bring forth fruit in due season ; that is, he shall do good works as an example, and speak good words to the worship of God, and not for vainglory. “ In due season ” is said against them that fast when they should feast, and feast when they should fast ; against covetous men that delay to give their fruit until it is rotten, or until they die.

He prays wisely who says “ Teach me thy good judgment and knowledge ”;<sup>1</sup> that is to say “ goodness, judgment and knowledge teach me.” What is judgment but the correcting of manners ? At first we are taught righteousness, and corrected by discipline ; later we come to know what we should do and what we should shun. In the end we delight not in earthly things, but in things eternal, heavenly, and divine.

When a man with all diligence has set himself to do the will of his maker and has so grown in virtue that he has overtaken another in the spiritual life both in steadfastness of purpose and in longing for Christ, he ought not on that account to rejoice nor praise himself, nor consider himself better than the other. Rather should he esteem himself the worst and the most miserable. He should judge no man but himself, and esteem all others before himself ; he should not desire to be called holy of men, but rather to be despised. When he comes amongst men he should seek to be the

<sup>1</sup>Ps. cxix. 66.

last and least thought of ; for the greater thou art the more shouldest thou make thyself meek in all things. So shalt thou find grace in the sight of God to be made high. The power of God is great and held in honour by the meek ; therefore it is despised by the proud since they seek not the worship of God but their own happiness.

If thou dost receive with gladness the favour of the people and the honour of men for thy holiness and good reputation in this life, thou hast assuredly received thy reward. If thou dost appear marvellous in penance and chastity, and dost rejoice more with the joy of men than of angels, in the time to come nothing but torment awaits thee. Therefore thou shouldest utterly despise thyself, and forsake all the joy of this world, and think and do nothing but, as it were, in view of God's love, so that all thy life, inward and outward, may cry aloud the praise of God.

In food and drink be sparing and wise. In eating or drinking forget not the God that feeds thee ; but praise, bless, and glorify Him in every morsel, so that thy heart is more concerned with the praise of God than with thy food ; neither is thy soul parted at any moment from God. So doing, in the sight of Jesus Christ, thou shalt be thought worthy of a crown, and shalt avoid the temptations of the devil that wait to deceive most men in food and drink. By taking too much food many are cast down from the height of virtue, or else by too great abstinence they undermine that virtue.

There are many that vary in eating, so that they always take either too little or too much; and never acquire a reasonable method of living while they imagine first one thing then the other to be the better. The ignorant and unlearned, who have never felt the sweetness of Christ's love, imagine that holiness consists in unwise abstinence, and they believe that they cannot be worthy of the praise of God unless they be known by all men to be remarkable for their frugality and abstinence.

Abstinence of itself is not holiness, but if it be wise it helps us to be holy. If it be unwise it prevents holiness, because it destroys discipline without which virtues become vices. If a man wishes to be markedly abstemious he ought to shun the presence of other men and their praises, lest he become proud and so lose everything, for men consider the most frugal to be the holiest, whereas they are often the greatest sinners.

He that has really tasted the sweetness of endless love will never consider himself to exceed any man in abstinence, but the lower he esteems himself the more marvellous will he be held among men. The best thing, and as I suppose the most pleasing with God, is to conform thy practice in eating and drinking to the time, place, and condition of those with whom thou art; then shalt thou not be thought wilful, nor a hypocrite in religion.

Be well assured that if one or two think well of such a man, yet others will call him a hypocrite or a deceiver.

There are some so desirous of flattery that they refuse to be regarded as ordinary men ; for either they eat so little that they move men to speak of them, or else they procure different food in order to appear different from other men ; may such folly and obstinacy be far from me.

It is a wholesome thing for those who fast little to give preference to those that fast much, and to grieve inwardly that they cannot practice such abstinence. Those that fast much should esteem others, whose merits are more hidden, to exceed their own abstinence which earns the praise of many. But unless it be clothed with meekness and charity austerity is of no account with Christ.

The virtue of some is truly the greater in that it is not seen of men. Who can tell how much love a man has towards God, or how much compassion towards his neighbour ? The work of charity exceeds beyond all comparison the practice of fasting or abstinence, and all other works that may be seen of men. It often happens that he who in the sight of men is seen least to fast, interiorly and before Christ is most fervent in love.

He must indeed be strong that will manfully use the love of God. Often a man cannot pray because the body is weakened with disease ; then much less can he lift himself up to high things with fervent desire. I would rather a man failed for the greatness of love than



for too much fasting, as the Bride of the Canticles said of herself : “ I am sick with love.”<sup>1</sup>

Be therefore steadfast in all thy ways and order thy life according to the rule shown to thee, and if thou dost not obtain thy desires at first, do not doubt, but be patient ; for by long use and time thou shalt come to perfection.

If thou be a pilgrim or dost rest by the way, whatever thou doest in this life have an eye to God. Let not thy thought go from Him, and reckon the time to be wasted in which thou dost not remember God. In the night praise Him and seek His love, so that sleep may find thee occupied in prayer and the recollection of God. See that the mind is not filled with vain thoughts or occupied with other considerations, but strive to attain and hold fast this steadfastness, so that thou dost not dread the misery of this world nor desire immoderately to possess its good things. He that fears to suffer adversity has not yet learnt to despise the world, and he that rejoices in worldly things is far from things eternal.

It belongeth to the grace of abstinence to despise adversities and prosperities, as well as death itself for the sake of endless life. Love is the desire for heavenly things alone. A perfect lover rejoices to die and patiently suffers in this life. If, by the grace of Christ, thou dost reach such perfection, thou shalt not be without tribulation and temptation ; to the proof of which we will now turn.

<sup>1</sup>Cant. v. 8.



## CHAPTER V.

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### OF TRIBULATION.

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WHEN the devil sees one man out of thousands perfectly turned to God ; following in the footsteps of Christ ; despising this present world ; loving and seeking only things unseen ; doing perfect penance ; and purging himself from all evil of mind and body, he prepares a thousand deceptions to harm him and a thousand means to turn him from the love of God. He seeks to persuade him to the love of the world ; to fill him again with the wickedness of sin so that at the very least with unclean thoughts he should be made hateful to God. He brings against him persecution, tribulation, slander, false accusations of sin, and all kinds of hatred ; so that pain may wound and slay him even if prosperity cannot tempt him.

At one moment he puts before him hardness of life, at another luxury, and brings to his mind the recollection of bodily lusts. He gathers together visions of sin. He recalls old wickedness, and the delights of past love. He influences heart and body with the fires of sin. He begins with the least but goes on to the greatest. With great diligence he tries to bring against us all kinds

of temptation, torment and tribulation ; and with disappointment he grieves that we, by the mercy of God, have escaped from his toils.

He seeks to separate us from the other-worldly embrace, most sweet and chaste, of everlasting love ; and afterwards to defile us in the depths of degradation. No words can express that unhappiness.

The man who left the delicacies of kings for swine's food would be considered mad. Yet he is even more foolish that forsakes the delicious meat of uncreated wisdom, and yields himself to the wickedness of the flesh. Are not gluttony and lust like swine's husks, and they that indulge such things are they not feeding the devil ?

Patience must teach us how to resist the tribulation and temptations of our enemies and to stand against them ; of which we will now speak.



## CHAPTER VI.

### OF PATIENCE.

THE children of God should not eat the food of animals, but despise all unlawful lusts and worldly comfort for the love of Christ. He that is fed with the bread that cometh down from heaven in no way desires the things which are offered him by the devil. When temptation or tribulation arise spiritual armour must be put on, for it is time to go to battle.

Temptations are overcome by steadfast faith and love; tribulation by patience. What is patience but the voluntary suffering of adversity? He that is patient murmurs at no grief, but at all times praises God.<sup>1</sup> The more patient a man is under provocation the more glorious shall he be in heaven.

Tribulation is to be gladly endured whether it be adversity, or annoyance and bitterness, or pain, sickness and thirst; for by these and the like our sinful nature is made clean, and our reward increased. We must either be consumed with the fire of God's love and of tribulation in this life, or else be most bitterly crucified and punished in the fires of purgatory or hell. Choose therefore; we cannot escape one or other. Here and

<sup>1</sup>Ps. xxxv. 28.

now with little pain—indeed, with joy if we cleave to God—we may escape all pain to come.

Tribulations are sent to us to withdraw us from the love of the world, so that we be not punished more severely in the life to come. By sorrow we must be cleansed from the stains of lust. If sinners “plow upon our backs and make long furrows,”<sup>1</sup> they do not trouble us but themselves, if we endure it with patience; if they put us to a little pain they lay up a crown for us, but torment for themselves.

The wicked are allowed to pass through this life without great tribulations, but in the time to come no joy is left for them. Therefore holy men love tribulations for they know that through such experiences they will win endless life. On the other hand the lost always murmur under adversities, and flee from them as much as they can. As long as they are given overmuch to the things of this life, they are deprived of the hope of things eternal. In outward circumstances only can they find comfort, since they have lost utterly the desire for heavenly things.

There is no soul on earth but either loves creatures or the Creator. If it loves the creature it loses God and goes with the creature it loves to death. All such love in the beginning is labour and foolishness, it passes into weariness and unhappiness, and ends in hatred and pain.

<sup>1</sup>Ps. cxxix. 3.



He that loves his Maker forsakes all that is in the world and counts it all joy and sweetness to speak of Him and with Him ; his refreshment is the thought of God. He closes his outward senses lest death enter by the window, and he be occupied in vain concerns. Sometimes despising, reproof, scorn and slander are brought against him ; therefore he must needs take the shield of patience and be more ready to forget than to remember wrongs. He will pray for the conversion of those that hate and attack him, and will not concern himself with pleasing man, but rather fear to offend God.

If thou be tempted in the flesh learn to discipline it that the spirit be not overcome. Temptation to which we do not consent results in the increase of virtue. For no man knows whether he be weak or strong till he be tested. Likewise no man is called patient when all goes well but only when he is sorely driven by misfortune ; then shall he know if he possess the grace of patience. Many seem patient when they are not pricked, but when a soft wind—not of misfortune but only of correction—touches them their mind turns at once to bitterness and wrath ; and if they hear a single word uttered against them they give back two even more ungodly.

The fiery darts of the enemy are to be quenched with the meekness and sweetness of Christ's love ; nor is place to be given to temptation however grievous it may be. For the greater the battle the more splendid the

victory and the higher the reward, for it is written :  
“ Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”<sup>1</sup>

Rest assured that thou art in the way of life if contempt be to thee as praising, poverty as riches, hunger as meat ; and if thou suffer them with unruffled mind. Flee, and hate as much as possible the praise of men ; for it is most praiseworthy to be worthy of praise, and not to be praised of men. Despise therefore favour, worship, and all vainglory ; endure with meekness wrath, hatred and all detractions, and so by evil report and good report cease not to make haste toward the Kingdom of Heaven.

Oft-times we fall in order that, taught by many weaknesses, we may stand the more firmly. The strong fear not, nor are the patient made sorrowful in adversity, as it is written “ There shall no evil happen to the just.”<sup>2</sup> In such a disposition, no wonder is it if thou shalt overcome all temptations and quench all malice. Thou shalt see thy tormentors more unhappy than thou art, if with all thy mind thou shalt cleave to Christ.

<sup>1</sup>Jas. i., 12.

<sup>2</sup>Prov. xii., 21.

## CHAPTER VII.

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### OF PRAYER.

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**I**N the midst of temptation or tribulation have recourse at once to prayer. If thou prayest fervently thou shalt have help. Distractions sometimes come and waverings of heart; and thoughts of different kinds fill the mind to hinder it from the praise of God. At such times it is good to meditate upon holiness, and so shall thy prayers become effectual.

If any have left all worldly occupations for the love of God and are continually given to holy prayer and meditation, within a short time, by the grace of God, they will find their heart established in love and prayer. No longer will they waver between this and that, but remain in endless peace. It is a source of great strength to have a steadfast heart occupied in frequent prayer and the singing of psalms. By diligent prayer we overcome the devil and weaken his attacks and provocations. He is enfeebled and without power, so long as we continue unwearied in strong prayer.

Those men who have made it their custom to pray for a long time, sometimes find even greater sweetness and a more fervent desire of prayer. While that sweetness and desire last it is good not to cease from prayer. When they cease—as sometimes happens because the flesh is weak—they should turn to the reading of Holy Scripture or do some other profitable thing so that they

do not allow their thoughts to wander from God ; and that when they turn to prayer again they may be more alert than they were before.

We pray well when we think of nothing else, but have all our thoughts turned to heaven, and our soul inflamed with the fire of the Holy Ghost. In this way a wonderful fulness of God's goodness will be found in us ; for from the innermost depths of our heart the love of God shall rise, and all our prayer will be fervent and effectual ; so that we shall not hurry over the words but with great crying and urgency offer every syllable to the Lord. Our heart being thus kindled with the fire of love, our prayer will also be kindled and offered by our lips with great sweetness in the sight of God, so that it becomes a great joy to pray. When this great sweetness is given to one who prays, his very prayer becomes praise.

Some are foolish that pay more heed to meditation than to prayer, not knowing that God's speech is a consuming fire ; so that with it the wickedness of sin is burnt up, and the mind inflamed with love. They say that they will first meditate and so establish their hearts ; but they are established the later since they are not strengthened by prayer.

Although we cannot practise recollection as we should like, we should not cease from trying ; little by little we should seek to grow in prayer, so that Jesus Christ may establish us at the last. To which end meditation is a help if it be not over-indulged in length or method.

## CHAPTER VIII.

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### OF MEDITATION.

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**I**T is good to meditate upon the passion and death of Christ ; and frequently to remember how much pain and grief He gladly endured for our sake ; in going about and preaching ; in hunger, thirst, cold, heat, reproaches, cursings and sufferings. In this way it will not be hard for His unprofitable servants to follow their Lord and King.

He that says he dwells in Christ ought to walk as He did. Christ says (speaking by Jeremiah) : “ Remember mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall ”;<sup>1</sup> that is to say, of sorrow and bitterness, by which I went from the world to the Father.

This recollectedness or meditation upon the passion and death of Christ overcomes the devil and destroys his crafts ; it quenches the temptations of the flesh and kindles the soul with the love of Christ ; it raises, cleanses and purifies the mind. It is the most profitable subject of meditation for those that are newly converted to Christ. It sets forth the perfect manhood of Jesus Christ wherein a man should ever rejoice, and in which he has material both for joy and sorrow. Joy for the certainty of our

<sup>1</sup>Lam. iii., 19.

redemption ; sorrow for the wickedness of our sinning, for which so wonderful a sacrifice is offered. The ignorant and fleshly soul is not enraptured by the contemplation of the perfect Godhead until all fleshly hindrances are done away by meditation and contemplation of the manhood.

When a man begins to have a clean heart, and no vision of earthly things can any longer deceive him, then he is admitted to high things, that in the love of the Godhead he may be made wonderfully glad. Some think on the joy of the blessed angels and holy souls rejoicing with Christ ; and this thought belongs to contemplation. Some meditate upon the misery of man's condition and his sin, and dispute in thought about his folly in forgetting unseen joys for the vanities of this present life. Others dispose their thoughts as follows : to want nothing but the praise and desire of their Maker, so that they may love Him as much as is possible for men in this life. To such a meditation no man comes save he that is well versed in that which we have already mentioned. This last is the best method of meditation and makes a man most contemplative.

As the lives and habits of the saints vary, so are their meditations different. Yet all reach the one goal and the same happiness because their motives are alike ; though by different ways, through the same love which is more manifest in one than another. For this reason the psalmist writes " He shall lead me in the paths of



righteousness,"<sup>1</sup> as if to say there is one righteousness and many paths by which we are led to the joy of everlasting life. Though all are one in being, we are different in needs and are led to God by various paths. Some go by a low path, some by a middle, and some by a high. The higher path is given to him that is fore-ordained to love Christ more; not because he works more than others, or gives or suffers more, but because he loves more. Which love is heat and sweetness, and seeks a dwelling in all men.

No man may set his own feet in any of these paths, but must take that which God has chosen for him. Sometimes they that seem to be in the higher path are in the lower, and the lower in the higher; for the journey of the soul towards God is an interior one and does not consist in any outward form of living which a man may practice. According to the disposition and desire of his meditation is to be shewn in which path a man is walking; no man's place in the sight of God may be judged by his outward works. Therefore it is foolish to attempt to judge who are the elect of God and to say "He passes him," or "His merits are far below this other's," when plainly we do not know their minds; which if we knew we might legitimately judge.

God wills to keep this hidden from men, lest they despise some too much, or pay too great honour to others. For doubtless if they could but see the hearts of men

<sup>1</sup>Ps. xxiii. 3

many whom they honour they would despise, and others that they esteem not nor desire to see, they would honour as most worthy of love—indeed as much as they honour the holy angels.

The good thoughts and meditations of the elect are the gift of God which he sheds on each in accordance with his state and condition. Therefore I can tell thee how I meditate, though I cannot say what would be the best method for thee, since I do not see thy inward desires. I am sure that those meditations are most pleasing to God and profitable to thee that God in His mercy sends thee.

Nevertheless at first thou mayest use the words of other men ; that I know by experience. If thou despise the teaching of the learned and imagine that thou canst thyself find something better than they teach thee in their writings, know of a certainty that thou shalt not taste the love of Christ. It is foolish to say, “ God taught them, why should he not teach me ? ” I answer “ Because thou art not such as they were.” Thou art proud and obstinate, and they were meek and lowly ; they asked nothing of God in presumption, but, humbling themselves took knowledge from the saints. He taught them that we might be taught of them in their books.

If thou desirest the love of Christ in thy meditation or to chant his praises thou art in a good disposition. But those meditations in which thou feelest the most sweetness in God are the most profitable.

## CHAPTER IX.

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### OF READING.

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**I**F thou wilt experience the love of God and art afire for the joys of Heaven, and if thou wouldest learn to despise earthly things, be not negligent in meditating and reading the Holy Scriptures ; and chiefly in those parts where they teach conduct and how to escape the wiles of the devil ; and where they speak of the love of God and of the contemplative life. Hard sayings may be left to arguers and to wise men well trained in doctrine.

Reading of the Holy Scriptures helps us much to acquire habits of holiness. By it we learn our faults and our good deeds, where we sin and where we escape, what we should do and what we should avoid, and the most subtle deceits of our enemies are laid open before us. The Holy Scriptures kindle within us the fire of love and move us to penitence. If we delight in them as in all manner of riches, they spread before us a veritable banquet of delights.

Let not desire of the honour, favour, or praise of men incite us to the study of Holy Scripture, but the pure intention to please God ; so that we may know how to love Him, and to teach our neighbours the same.

We ought not to be reputed wise by the people ; but should hide our knowledge rather than exhibit it for praise ; as it is written “ I have hid thy words in my heart—that I should not sin against thee,”<sup>1</sup> that is, in empty or vain boastings.

The sole cause of our speaking should be the praise of God and the edification of our neighbours, that the saying may be fulfilled in us, “ His praise shall ever be in my mouth.”<sup>2</sup> That is so when we seek not our own honour, and speak not against His praise.

<sup>1</sup>Ps. cxix. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Ps. xxxiv., 1



## CHAPTER X.

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### OF PURITY OF HEART.

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**B**Y the nine degrees already mentioned man attains to that purity of heart wherewith he may enjoy the sight of God. Purity, I say, that may be had in this life. How may perfect purity be reached here where so often man is defiled at least by venial sin? Even the feet of saints need to be washed, since they draw upon themselves the dust of the earth.

Who can truly say “ I am free from sin ? ” No one in this life ; for as Job says, “ If I wash myself with snow water and make my hands never so clean, yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me.”<sup>1</sup> “ If I washed myself with snow water ” meaning true penitence ; “ and make my hands never so clean ” by works of innocence, “ yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch ” of venial sins that cannot be avoided, “ and mine own clothes shall abhor me,” that is to say, my flesh makes me loathe myself, and sensuality that is so frail, slippery, and ready to love the beauty of this world, often makes me sin. The apostle said, “ Let not sin reign in your mortal body,”<sup>2</sup> that is to say “ Sin must be in us, but it need not rule over us.”

<sup>1</sup>Job ix., 30, 31.      <sup>2</sup>Rom. vi. 12.

What purity therefore can a man have in this life? Truly he may have great purity of heart if he accustom himself to reading, prayer and meditation as we have said before. Though he sometimes commit a venial offence, yet henceforth, because his whole heart is turned to God, sin is destroyed. The fire of love burns up in him all stain of sin, as a drop of water cast into a furnace is consumed.

To acquire a pure heart therefore we need to have the mind set upon God, for in this state all thoughts are directed towards Christ and the whole heart spread out before Him. In a clean conscience nothing is bitter, sharp or hard, but all is sweet and lovely. Out of a pure heart rises the song of joy, sweet melody, and joyful mirth. A wonderful joy towards God is given, and heavenly melodies are poured out in the soul. In this state a man can know that he has a love which he need never lose. Henceforth he lives in fear, not lest he should suffer torment, but lest he should offend his Lover.

I hesitate to say more, since I am myself so great a sinner. Oft-times my flesh is attacked and assailed.

Though much that appertains to the love of God and the contemplative life is included in the things already said, yet somewhat more must be added for the reader's profit.



## CHAPTER XI.

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### OF THE LOVE OF GOD.

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“O MY Creator uncreate, most sweet and pleasant light, enlighten the keenness of my spiritual sight with uncreated clearness, that my mind being cleansed from all uncleanness and made marvellous in grace, may swiftly pass to the joyful heights of love ; and enflamed by Thee, may rest, rejoicing in thee, Lord Jesus. Thus enraptured with divine sweetness and stablished in the vision of heavenly things, I shall be never made glad save by Thee.”

“O everlasting Love, enflame my soul with the love of God, so that nothing save His embraces may set my heart on fire. O good Jesu, who shall make me to feel Thee here who mayest now be neither felt nor seen ? Pour out of Thyself into the depths of my soul. Enter my heart and fill it with Thy sweetness. Refresh my mind with the strong wine of Thy love that, forgetting all evil and having only Thee, I may be glad and rejoice in Jesus my God. Leave me not, most sweet Lord, but stay with me for ever ; for Thy presence is my only comfort and apart from Thee I am full of sorrow.”

“O Holy Ghost, that givest grace where Thou wilt, enter into me, and draw me to Thyself. Transform the

nature which thou hast given me by Thy grace, that my heart, filled with Thy joy, may despise the things of this world. May she receive spiritual gifts from Thee, the Giver, and entering by happiness into unspeakable light be all consumed by holy love. Burn up my inward parts and all my heart with the fire that burns for ever on Thine altar."

"Come, I pray thee, Thou sweet and true joy ! Come, most sweet and most desired ! Come, my Love who art my only comfort ! Enter a soul that longs for Thee. Enflame with Thy divine fire all my heart ; enlighten my inmost parts with Thy radiant light ; feed me with love."

Thou shalt rejoice in these and other meditations for so thou mayest attain to the heart of love. Love suffers no soul to dwell alone but draws it to its Lover ; so that the heart is more in that place where it loves, than the body is in the place where it lives and feels.

There are three degrees of Christ's love ; the first is called *insuperable* ; the second, *inseparable* ; and the third, *singular or solitary*.

Love is insuperable when it cannot be overcome by any other desire ; when it casts away hindrances and quenches all temptations and fleshly lusts ; when it patiently suffers all hardships for Christ and is overcome by no flattery nor ease. All labour is light to him that loves, nor can a man better overcome labour than by love.

Love is inseparable when the mind is on fire with a great love, and cleaves to Christ with unswerving attention. It suffers Him not to depart for an instant, but as if he were bound in heart to Him, thinks and sighs after Him, cries out to be held by His love alone and loosened from the fetters of mortality, and to be alone with Him whom he desires to behold. So much does he worship and love the name JESU that it remains in his thoughts for ever.

Where the love of Christ is so firmly fixed in the heart of the man that loves God and despises the world that no other love can root it out, it is called *high*. When he holds unswervingly to Christ, ever remembering and never forgetting Him, it is called *everlasting* and *inseparable*. If this be high and everlasting, what love can be higher or greater ?

Yet there is a third degree that is called singular or solitary. It is one thing to be high, and another to be alone. If thou seekest or receivest any comfort apart from God and yet dost love the highest, such is not singular love. Thou seest then to what heights thou must attain before thou art alone. Love reaches the singular degree when it excludes all comfort but that which is in Jesus and when nothing but Jesus can suffice it.

The soul that has attained to this degree loves Him alone. She yearns for Christ and desires only Him. She waits and sighs for Him ; in Him she is on fire.

Nothing is sweet to her, nor does she taste anything, save that which is in Jesus, whose memory is as a song of music in a feast of wine. Whatever self offers her or brings to her remembrance is immediately spurned and despised unless it accord with the will of Jesus. She suppresses all habits that do not bring her to the love of Christ. Whatever she does seems to be unprofitable and unendurable unless it leads to Christ, the end of her desire. When she has learnt to love Christ she knows that she has all that she desires, and without Him all things are distasteful to her. Because she desires to love Him eternally she remains steadfast and grows not weary in body nor soul; rather does she love with perseverance and suffer all things gladly. The more she thus loves Him the more will she burn with love and the more like she is to Him.

No wonder that loneliness is to be found in one that has no companions among men. The more enraptured he is with inward joys, the less is he concerned with outward things; nor is he held back by the sorrows and cares of this life. It seems as if the soul could not suffer pain, since she rejoices for ever in God.

“ O my soul, cease from the love of this world and be wholly consumed by the love of Christ, so that it may ever be sweet for thee to speak, read, write and think of Him, to pray to Him and praise Him. O God, my soul desires to behold thee ! She cries to Thee from

afar. She is on fire for Thee and languishes in Thy love. O Love that never faileth, Thou hast overcome me. O everlasting Sweetness and Fairness, Thou hast pierced my heart, so that I fall vanquished and wounded. For joy I scarce can live, and almost die ; I cannot endure the sweetness of such majesty in this perishing body."

" All my heart is fixed in longing for Jesus and turned into the fire of love ; it is transformed with joy. O good Jesus, have mercy on a miserable sinner ! Shew Thyself to me and give medicine for the pain of my longing. I feel myself not sick but languishing in Thy love. He that does not wholly love Thee loses all ; he that follows not after Thee is mad. Be Thou my joy, my love, and desire until I see Thee, O God of Gods, in Sion."

Charity is the noblest, the most excellent, the sweetest of all virtues, that brings the lover to the Beloved and joins Christ to His elect. It forms in us again the image of the Holy Trinity, and makes the creature to resemble the Creator.

O gift of love, how worthy is it, that reaches to the highest place the angels have. The more of love a man receives in this life the greater and higher shall his place be in Heaven. O wondrous joy of everlasting love that lifts all those that be Christ's to the heavenly places holding them fast above all worldly things !

“ O dear charity, he is not truly created that—what-ever else he may possess—has not thee. He that is occupied in rejoicing in thee is at once raised above earthly things. Charity enters boldly the privy chamber of the Everlasting King. She alone is not ashamed to receive Christ, since she has sought and loved Him. Christ is hers ; she can hold Him, since Christ cannot fail to receive her whose desire is to obey Him. Without charity no work is pleasing to God. She makes all things delightful to Him. Charity is a seat in heaven ; the fellowship of angels ; a marvellous holiness ; a blessed vision ; and everlasting life.”

“ O holy charity how sweet thou art and full of comfort ; thou dost create again that which was broken. Thou restorest the fallen and settest the captive free, thou makest man to be equal with angels. Thou liftest up those that are down and those that are raised thou dost endow with sweetness.”

In this degree love is chaste, holy and voluntary ; loving that which is loved for its own sake, not for gain ; and uniting itself to that which is loved. Seeking nothing outward ; content with itself ; burning, fragrant ; it draws love to itself in a manner passing all description. Rejoicing in the loved one ; despising and forgetting all else ; recollected ; reaching upward in desire ; overwhelmed in his love ; continuing in embraces ; overcome by kisses ; the soul is altogether consumed in the fire of love.



So the lover of Christ keeps no check upon his love and covets no position in the heart of God, because however fervent and joyful he be in the love of God, in this life, he fain would love Him more and more. Yea, though he live evermore in this life, yet will he never stand still nor fail to make progress in love ; but rather the longer he lives the more will he burn with love.

Verily God is of infinite greatness, more than we can think ; of unspeakable sweetness ; unknowable by created things ; and can never be comprehended by us as He is in Himself. But even here and now, whenever the heart begins to burn with a desire for God, she is made able to receive the uncreated light and, inspired and fulfilled by the gifts of the Holy Ghost, she tastes the joys of heaven. She transcends all visible things and is raised up to the sweetness of eternal life. When the heart is filled with the sweetness of the Godhead and the fire of creating light, she is offered in sacrifice to the everlasting King, and being accepted is wholly consumed.

“ O joyous love, strong, ravishing, burning, voluntary, brave, unquenched, that subdues all my heart to Thy service nor suffers it to think of aught save Thee. Thou claimest for Thyself all my life, my delight, and my very being.”

Let Christ, whom we love for Himself, be the beginning of our love. So shall we love whatever



claims our love for the sake of Him who is the well of love, and into whose hands, we commend all whom we love and that love us. Herein truly is perfect love ; when all the intent of the mind, all the secret working of the heart, is lifted up into the love of God ; so that the power and joy of true love is so great that no worldly happiness nor material possessions are any longer lawful or even pleasant.

O inseparable love ! O singular and solitary love ! Even if there were no torments for the wicked nor rewards for the chosen, thou oughtest not to be separated from holy love. Better were it for thee to endure untold grief than to commit a single deadly sin. Love God for Himself and for no other reason, and it follows that God alone is loved by thee. Else how should God be all in all, if there be in a man's heart any love for man ?

“ O pure charity, come into me and take me into thee, and so present me before God. Thou art pleasant to the taste, a sweet-smelling fragrance and pleasant odour, a cleansing fire, and an everlasting comfort. Thou makest men to be contemplative ; thou openest the gate of heaven ; thou shuttest the mouths of accusers ; thou makest God to be seen ; and coverest a multitude of sins. We praise thee, we preach thee, by thee we overcome the world ; in thee we rejoice, and by thee ascend the stairway of Heaven. In thy sweetness enter into me : and I commend me and mine to Thee for ever.”

## CHAPTER XII.

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### OF CONTEMPLATION.

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**C**ONTEMPLATIVE life, or contemplation, has three parts : reading, prayer, and meditation. In reading God speaks to us ; in prayer we speak to God. In meditation angels come down and teach us how to avoid wrong ; in prayer they ascend and offer our prayers to God. They are messengers between us and God.

Prayer is nothing else but a humble love towards God with which, when it is given to Him, He is pleased. Meditation upon God and holy things must follow after prayer and reading.

To reading belongs reasoning and the search for truth, which is the light of the soul. To prayer belongs praise, song, vision, and wonder ; and thus the contemplative life and contemplation itself is founded upon prayer. Meditation is concerned with God's inspiration, with understanding, wisdom, and desire.

Contemplation is hard to define. Some say it consists in the knowledge of things hidden and to come, or the withdrawal from worldly occupation, or the study of God's Word. Others maintain that contemplation is the open vision of truth when the heart is lifted up

in wonderment. Some assert, and with great degree of truth, that contemplation is joy in heavenly things. Others say, and say best of all, that contemplation is the death of all carnal desire through the joy of an uplifted heart.

To me it means that contemplation is the joyful song of the love of God received into the heart. This rejoicing is the end of perfect prayer and of the highest devotion in this life. This is the spiritual joy of the heart towards the everlasting Lover, which breaks forth into loud rejoicing. This is the last and most perfect of all the actions of this life. Therefore the psalmist says "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound : they shall walk, O Lord, in the joy of Thy countenance";<sup>1</sup> that is, in heavenly contemplation. He that dwells apart from God cannot rejoice in Jesus, nor taste the sweetness of His love. If he yearn to be for ever kindled with the fire of everlasting love, and to be made fair, with all purity of body and soul, and to be touched with the anointing of the Spirit, then he is indeed lifted up in all patience, humility, and gentleness to contemplation. Let him, without ceasing, seek for virtues, by which we are cleansed from sin in this life : then in another life, free from all pain, he will for ever rejoice in the life of blessedness. Moreover in this present exile also will he be counted worthy to feel the joyful gladness of God's love.

<sup>1</sup>Ps. lxxxix., 15 (lxxxix.. 16).

Be not slow to discipline thyself with prayer and watchings, and use holy meditations, for with these spiritual labours, and with sorrow and weeping from interior penitence, the love of Christ is kindled in thee, and all the virtues and gifts of the Holy Ghost are shed abroad in thy heart. Begin therefore with voluntary poverty. When thou art no longer desirous of aught in this world, thou shalt love in soberness, chastity and meekness before God and man. It sometimes happens that we have nothing, but to desire to have nothing is a great virtue. We may have many needs, and yet shall we desire to have nothing, so long as we use what we have to supply our needs and not our lusts. In this way he that seemeth to have many things has really nothing, for he does not love what he has, but only uses it for his bodily needs. Even the most perfect must take necessities else if he refuse to take the essentials of life, he is not perfect.

The rule of life for those who desire perfection should be : To despise all wordly goods for God's sake and yet to take from the world both food and clothing ; if these be lacking at any time not to murmur but to praise God ; and as far as possible to refuse all excess. The more inflamed a man becomes with the fire of everlasting light, the more meekly will he behave in times of adversity. The man that is meek without any pretence considers himself to merit contempt, and is not provoked to wrath by harm or reproof. Such a man, giving himself to

continual meditation, is permitted to ascend to the contemplation of heavenly things; and his inward vision being cleansed by his bodily sufferings, it is granted him to sing sweetly and ardently with spiritual joy. Even when he is concerned with outward things, he does not go about his tasks with pride but is made glad and enraptured, as in an ecstasy, with the sweetness of God's love, and is wondrously happy. Such is the contemplative life if it be approached aright. By constant practice of spiritual exercises we come to the contemplation of eternal verities. The heart is occupied with the vision of heavenly things, yet not clearly and openly : so long as we walk by faith we see as it were in a glass darkly. If our inward vision be turned to that spiritual radiance, though it see it not as it is in itself, yet it feels that it is there since it receives within itself the fragrance and heat of that unknown light. It is written in the Psalm : " The darkness and the light are both alike to thee."<sup>1</sup>

Although the darkness of sin be gone from a holy soul, and dark and unclean things be passed away, and though the heart be purged and enlightened, yet so long as we dwell in this life that wonderful light is not seen in its perfection. Holy and contemplative men behold the face of God through revelation. That is, either their minds are opened to understand Holy Scripture, or else the door of heaven is opened to them. This

<sup>1</sup>Ps. cxxxix., 12 (cxxxix., 11).

latter might be explained as follows : all hindrances between themselves and God are put away, their hearts are cleansed, and they behold the citizens of heaven. Some have experienced both these joys.

As we see nothing if we stand in the darkness, so in contemplation that enlightens the soul there is no visible light. Christ makes the darkness His resting-place and speaks to us out of the midst of a cloudy pillar. Nevertheless that which is felt is full of heavenly delight. This is the perfection of love : when a man, dwelling in the flesh, can only rejoice in God, and wills and desires nothing but God, or for God's sake. By this it is made manifest that holiness does not consist in heartfelt crying or tears, or in outward works, but in the sweetness of perfect charity and heavenly contemplation. Many are full at one moment of tears and crying, and afterwards turn away to do evil ; but no man defiles himself with worldly concerns if he has learnt to rejoice in everlasting love. Tears and sorrow belong to the newly-converted, to beginners and those who are making progress ; but to sing with joy and to proceed to contemplation is the mark of those that have attained perfection.

He that has done penance for a long time, has not yet done perfect penance, as long as he feels his conscience uneasy. In the meantime tears shall be his meat day and night ; for unless he first discipline himself with weeping and sorrow he cannot attain to the sweetness of



contemplation. Contemplative sweetness is only reached with great toil. It is not of man's merit, but God's gift. From the earliest moment until the present day no man has ever attained to the contemplation of everlasting love until he has utterly forsaken the vanity of the world. Moreover, he ought to accustom himself to meditation and devout prayer before he reaches out to the contemplation of heavenly joys.

Contemplation is sweet and desirable toil. It makes the believer glad and hurts him not. No man may have it save in joy; he is weary not when it comes but when it goes. O health-giving labour to which mortal men must set themselves! O noble and wondrous toil which those who sit still do the more perfectly! He must be still in mind and body whose heart is on fire with the Holy Ghost. Many know not how to be quiet in mind, nor how to put away empty and unprofitable thoughts, and cannot carry out the counsel of the Psalmist, "Be still and know that I am God."<sup>1</sup> Such as pray with their lips and whose minds wander are not worthy to taste and see how sweet the Lord is—how wondrous the heights of contemplation.

Every contemplative man loves to be alone, so that the more fervently, frequently, and unceasingly he may be employed in his heart's delight. The contemplative life is higher and richer in reward than the active life. All contemplatives are drawn by God to love a solitary

<sup>1</sup>Ps. xlv. 10.



life, and because of the sweetness of contemplation are especially fervent in love. It would seem as if solitary men raised by the gift of contemplation, are highly exalted and reach the greatest perfection, unless it be exceeded by some that attain the heights of the contemplative life and yet cease not to preach to others. Such excel all solitaries that are given only to contemplation, and not to the needs of their neighbours. Being in the same interior state, nevertheless for their preaching's sake, they are worthy of a crown.

A contemplative man is turned towards the unseen light with so great a longing that men often consider him a fool or mad, because his heart is so on fire with the love of Christ. Even his bodily appearance is changed, and is so far removed from other men that it seems as if God's child were a lunatic.

The contemplative soul gathers up all the self into the endless joy of love. Withdrawing herself inwardly, she goes not forth to seek worldly delights. Because she is fed inwardly with such delicacies, it is no wonder that she exclaims, "Should I find Thee without I would kiss Thee."<sup>1</sup> That is to say, freed from the flesh I may be worthy to find Thee and, beholding Thee face to face, be united to Thee for ever.

A devout soul given to the contemplative life, and filled with everlasting love, despises all the vanity of this world and, rejoicing in Jesus alone, yearns to be set free.

<sup>1</sup>Cant. viii. 1.

She is despised by those who love this world. She greatly longs to share with the angels in those joys which worldly adversity cannot destroy.

Nothing is more profitable, nothing more full of happiness, than the grace of contemplation that lifts us from the things of low degree and presents us to God. What is this grace but the beginning of joy? And what is perfect joy but the fulfilment of grace? In this fulfilment there is laid up for us a joyful happiness and a happy joy, a glorious eternity and an eternal glory; to live with the saints and dwell with the angels. And above all else—to know God truly; to love Him perfectly; to behold Him in the shining of His majesty; and, with wonderful songs of joy and melody, to praise Him for ever.

TO WHOM BE WORSHIP AND JOY

WITH THANKSGIVING

FOR EVER AND EVER

AMEN.



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